Rare & Unusual Mourning Covers

Purpose: The purpose of this exhibit is to introduce the topic of mourning covers used from various countries, and to display some very rare and unusual uses. Since this exhibit only shows covers and not individual stamps, it is a postal history class exhibit.

Background: Use of mourning covers dates back to the mid 1700s, but widespread use did not develop until the mid 1800s. They are usually readily identifiable by a black edge on the folded letter sheet or edge of the envelope. On rare occasions colors other than black were used, such as blue. They were used to send death announcements and continued to be used to the mourning period by grieving family members, generally about a year. However, some widows used mourning envelopes and stationary for many years, sometimes the rest of their lives.

Although still used in parts of Europe today, by the 1930s their popularity declined significantly. Initially, they were only used in Europe by royalty or upper class families. During the mid 1800s with the development of machines that could mass produce cheap envelopes along with dramatic reductions in postage rates, their use expanded rapidly in Europe and America. Eventually, their use spread to many parts of the world, often taken there by emigrating Europeans and Americans. There are over 265 countries that have recorded examples of mourning covers, many of whom no longer exist. They come in many sizes and styles, some with narrow black edging and some with quite wide outlines. Often mourning covers contained black edged stationary or cards. Collecting mourning covers offers the collector a wide variety of items and are a marvelous link to our history and how our ancestors dealt with life's inevitable ending.

Abraham Lincoln mourning cover used Sept. 25 (1865), New York City to Gainsville, New York. Postage paid with 1861 series rose three cent stamp, envelope style is Milgram AL 362. ex Jarrett

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I. Early Stampless

Very early stampless mourning cover, postmarked "Wieliczka 24 AUG", letter dated 1823. From Madame Krasicka to Countess Mecinski in Karlsbad, Austria. Earliest known mourning cover from Poland.

Stampless mourning cover dated May 15, 1849, from Paris, France to Dubline Ireland, British receiving hand stamps on back of cover.

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I. Early Stampless

Stampless Boyd's Express Post, Oct. 25 circa 1853. Boyd's was a private New York City mail delivery service from 1844-1878.

Stampless mourning cover from London (Charing Cross post office) to Boston, May 20, 1859, traveling via Liverpool via British Packet ship.

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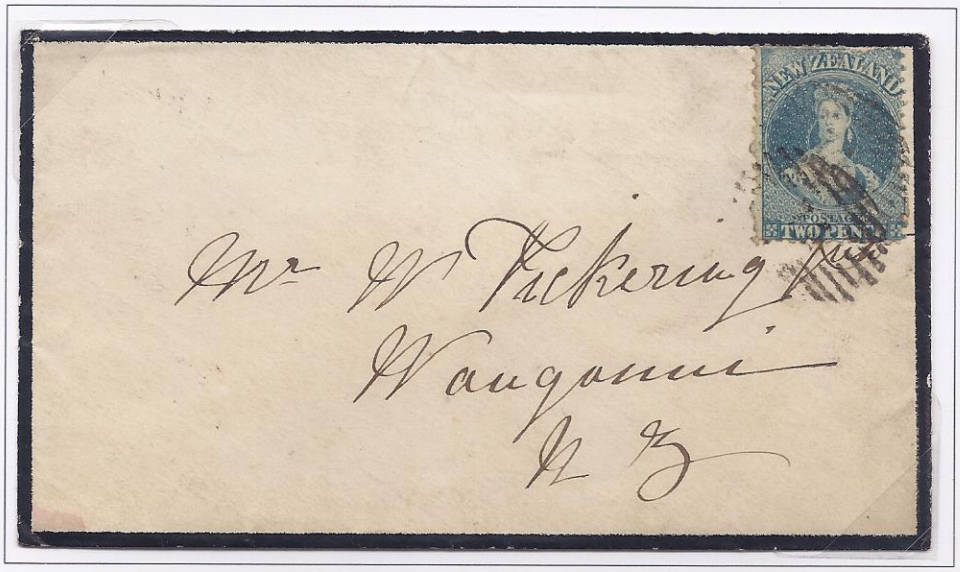
II. Early Stamped Uses

Mourning letter from Victoria (now part of Australia) with 1854 series one shilling stamp postmarked "Athy My 55", Melbourne ship handstamp on back. Sent via clipper ship "Red Jacket" to Ireland. ex Risvold.



New Zealand mourning cover franked with 2 pence 1864 series stamp, postmarked Picton (on back) dated Oct. 18, 1871, to Waugauni, New Zealand.

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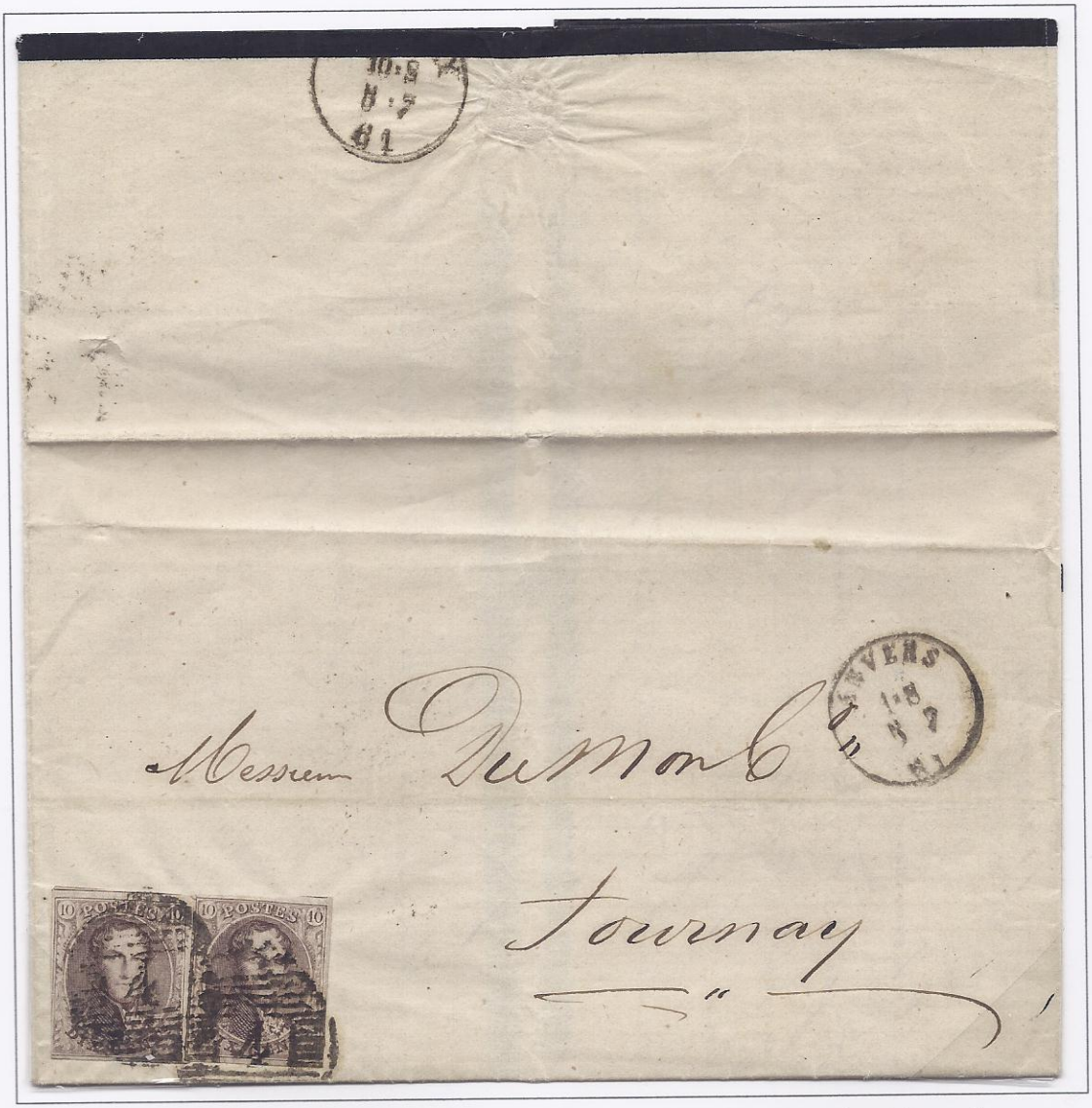
II. Early Stamped Uses



Belgian folded letter sheet mourning cover franked with two 1858 series 10 centime stamps. Postmarked "Anvers January 8, 1861, to Tournay with receiving mark on back.

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II. Early Stamped Uses

Transcontinental rate mourning cover from San Francicso, Cal. to Painsville, Ohio,, postmarked Sept. 21, 1858. Stamp is type III 1857 series ten cent. Letter went via Panama to New York, then on by train.

1866 Series Lincoln stamp, first mourning stamp ever issued, on mourning cover to France, postmarked Boston, Nov. 17, 1868 to Fountenay, France. Letter was carried on Cunard Line steamer "Java". Very rare use of this stamp and cover combination.

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II. Early Stamped Uses

Palmermo, Italy to Boston, Mass. postmarked April 19, 1867. Postage paid with pair of Italy 60 centesimi stamps. Very rare tranatlantic use of these stamps.

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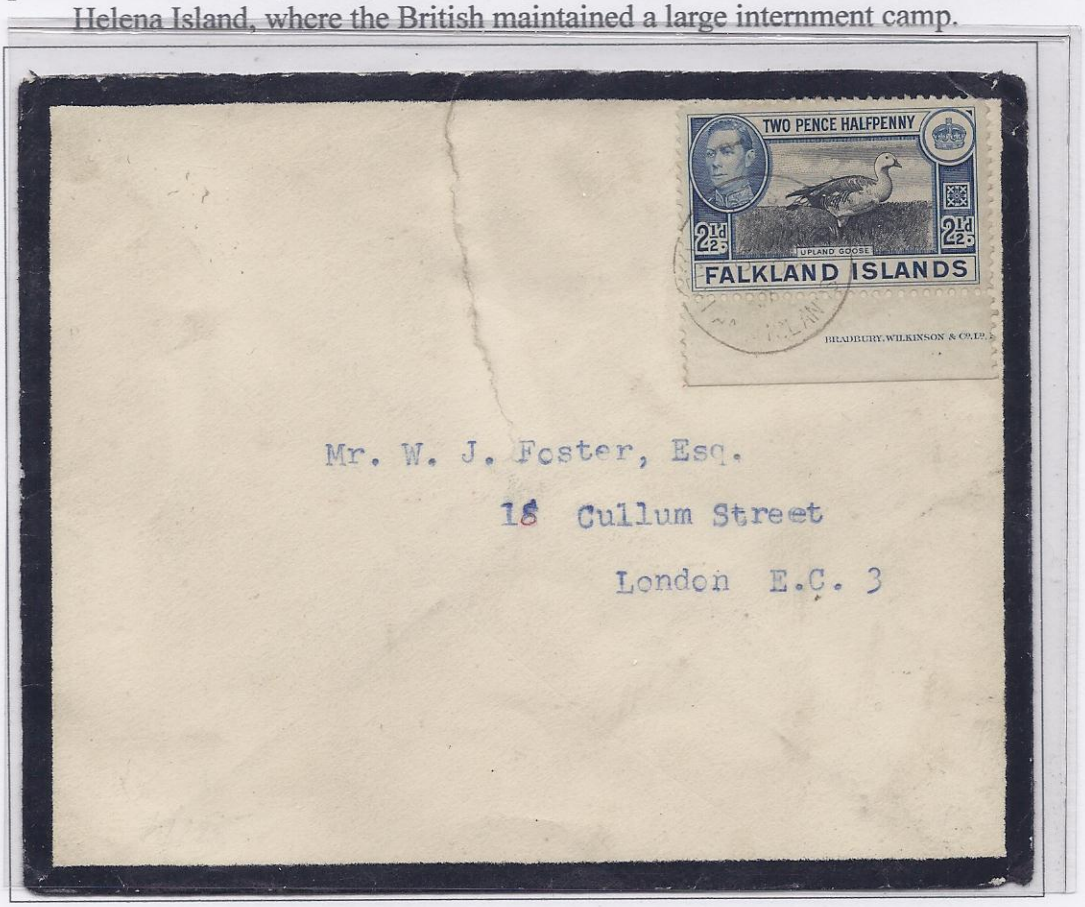
III. Unusual Points of Origin

Cape of Good Hope Witterputs 1901 postmark. Letter was sent to Boer prisoner of war after passing thru military censorship. It was forwarded to Saint Helena Island, where the British maintained a large internment camp.



Mourning cover from Falkland Islands to London, England circa 1938. Mourning covers from or to the Falklands are very scarce.

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III. Unusual Points of Origin

Mourning cover from Constantinople to Leeds, England postmarked Sept. 10, 1904, sent via Austrian Offices in Turkish Empire. Franked with five hellar stamp with 1 Piaster overprint. One of only a handful of mourning covers from this origin.

Extremely rare mourning cover from Yokahama, Japan to Albany, New York via San Francisco. Postage paid with pair of 1876 5 sen Japanese stamps, postmarked Oct. 9, 1880.